

Gill

EXPANDED PROGRAMME ON IMMUNIZATION

TRAINING COURSE ON PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

GILL TREMLETT

National Priorities

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Community Health Cell

Library and Information Centre

367, "Srinivasa Nilaya"

Jakkasandra 1st Main,

1st Block, Koramangala,

BANGALORE - 560 034.

Phone : 553 15 18 / 552 53 72

e-mail : chc@sochara.org

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TRAINING COURSE ON PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

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NATIONAL PRIORITIES

INTRODUCTION

In September 1978, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) declared their common goal to be "Health for All by the Year 2000."^{*} In addition, they endorsed the application of primary health care as the means to achieve that goal.

One approach to primary health care would be to identify a limited number of priority health problems which are most severe, which affect significantly large numbers of people, and for which feasible cost-effective control measures exist. Then, while primary health care as a whole is being enriched and extended, a concerted short-term effort would be made to promote those selected primary health care interventions which promise to have the highest impact on reducing morbidity and mortality. These selected interventions would be integrated with one another to reduce duplication of effort and to increase accessibility of care. Furthermore, primary health care efforts would emphasize involvement of the community in the provision of care. In an age when resources available for primary health care are limited, this approach may offer the greatest return for the money spent.


A priority goal for primary health care in most developing countries is the reduction of morbidity and mortality in children under the age of 5 years. The priority health problems for these young children will vary from country to country. This module describes a procedure which could be used to select the priority health problems for a country. The procedure involves three major steps:

- Assess importance of each health problem.
- Assess feasibility of each principal control measure.
- Combine assessments to establish priorities.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In this module, you will select the priority health problems in children under age 5 for the country of Fictitia. The skills that you practice in this module should prepare you to select the priority health problems for your country.

^{*}Primary Health Care, Alma Ata, 1978, Geneva, WHO, 1978.



Exercise

- Read and follow the instructions carefully.
- Write your answers on the worksheets provided.
- When you need data, refer to the description of Fictitia in the module titled Introduction ("Estimated Annual Morbidity and Mortality in Children Under Age Five for 1978-1980", "Leading Causes of Morbidity and Mortality," and "Public Perceptions of Health Problems").
- If you have any questions about the exercise, consult with a Course Facilitator.

The Minister of Health in Fictitia recently formed a Committee to make recommendations for integrating health care activities throughout the country and for setting national policies for primary health care. These recommendations will be presented for a final decision to a higher level group composed of the Ministers of Planning, Finance, Health, and other national ministries. For the purposes of this exercise, you are the Maternal and Child Health Director in the Ministry of Health and have been asked to serve on this Committee.

The first task assigned to the Committee is to identify the health problems of highest priority in Fictitia for children under 5 years of age. Fold out Worksheet A (page 15) and look at it carefully. The health problems on which Fictitia has morbidity and mortality data for children under age 5 are listed for you on Worksheet A in the first column. Use the worksheet and the following procedure to select the health problems which you consider to be of highest priority. Then be prepared to justify your selections in a group discussion.

1.0 ASSESS IMPORTANCE OF EACH HEALTH PROBLEM.

This step will use primarily morbidity and mortality data to assess the health problems in terms of their importance in Fictitia. The major factors which will be considered to assess a health problem's importance are incidence, mortality, and disability.

1.1 Assess Incidence

Incidence is the number of new cases of a health problem occurring in a defined population during a given time period. Examine data on the annual incidence in children under age 5 of each health problem listed on Worksheet A. Determine if the incidence of each listed problem is high, moderate, or low by comparing it with the incidence

of the other listed problems. Record your answer on Worksheet A in the column labeled "Incidence."

1.2 Assess Mortality

Mortality is the number of deaths from a health problem in a defined population during a given time period. Examine the annual mortality from each listed health problem in children under age 5. Determine if the mortality from each problem is high, moderate, or low by comparing it with the mortality due to other problems on the list. Enter your answers on Worksheet A in the column labeled "Mortality."

1.3 Assess Disability

Review information on the extent and duration of disability resulting from each health problem listed. Determine if the disability of each problem is relatively high, moderate, or low by comparing it with the disability of the other problems on the list. Record your answers on Worksheet A in the column labeled "Disability."

1.4 Assess Importance

- Examine the three answers you have recorded on Worksheet A for the first health problem listed. Use these answers to establish an overall assessment of the relative importance of this problem in Fictitia.

The way in which you make this overall assessment is up to you; there is no recommended procedure. You may wish to average the 3 answers, or you may consider a certain criterion more important than the others and therefore wish to give it more weight. For example, if you have described a health problem as having "moderate incidence," "high mortality," and "moderate disability," then your overall assessment of the importance of that health problem might be "high" if you consider mortality to be more important than the other criteria.

Assess the first listed health problem as having a relatively high, moderate, or low importance. Record your overall assessment on Worksheet A in the column labeled "Overall Importance." Your assessment may not be the same as the assessments of other participants and Course Facilitators. Therefore, you should be prepared to explain your decision.

- Assess the overall importance of each of the other diseases using the procedure above. Record each assessment in the column labeled "Overall Importance."

After you have completed Worksheet A, please discuss your work with a Course Facilitator.

2.0 ASSESS FEASIBILITY OF THE CONTROL MEASURE.

Frequently, priority decisions are made after completing only an assessment of the importance of health problems. However, in order to plan effectively the delivery of primary health care, the feasibility of each principal control measure for each health problem must be considered. Factors which influence the feasibility of a control measure include technical feasibility, economic feasibility, and the public's likely response to the control measure. The data needed to assess the factors are frequently sparse and unreliable. Decisions must often be based on imprecise estimates.

Fold out Worksheet B (pages 17-21) and notice that the health problems in Fictitia have again been listed for you in the first column. Use this worksheet and the following procedure to assess the feasibility of each control measure for each listed health problem. The major steps for assessing feasibility of each control measure are:

- Specify principal control measures.
- Assess technical feasibility of implementing each control measure.
- Assess economic feasibility of implementing each control measure.
- Assess likelihood of good public response to each control measure.

2.1 Specify Principal Control Measures

A control measure is a preventive strategy which is designed to:

- prevent cases of a health problem from occurring, and/or
- prevent death or serious complications of cases of a health problem.

For example, measles immunization is a control measure which prevents cases of measles from ever occurring. On the other hand, OR therapy given for diarrhoea is a control measure which prevents more severe dehydration and death. Not every health problem has a control measure to prevent cases and a control measure to prevent deaths or other serious complications.

Consider the principal measures which are available for controlling the first listed health problem. Select the best available control measure or combination of control measures for preventing cases of the health problem. Record the selected control measure or measures

on Worksheet B in the column labeled "Principal Control Measure" and the box labeled "To prevent cases:."

Name the control measure in a few words, for example, "immunization" or "vector control." If no principal control measures exist to prevent cases, write "none" in the box.

Now select the best available control measure or combination of control measures for preventing deaths or other complications of the first health problem. Record the selected control measure or measures in as few words as possible (for example, "oral rehydration" or "drug treatment") on Worksheet B in the box labeled "To prevent deaths or complications:." If no principal control measures exist to prevent deaths or complications, write "none" in the box.

Repeat this procedure to select the principal control measures for preventing cases and for preventing deaths or serious complications of each health problem listed. Record your answers on Worksheet B in the appropriate box under the column labeled "Principal Control Measure."

2.2 Assess Technical Feasibility

For each control measure to prevent cases and each control measure to prevent deaths or complications listed on Worksheet B, assess the technical feasibility of implementing that control measure in Fictitia. To make this assessment, use all available information in Fictitia to answer the following questions for each health problem:

- Is the control measure effective?
- Does implementation of the control measure require any special equipment or supplies (for example, refrigerators or freezers, drugs or vaccines)?
- Does implementation of the control measure require any special skills or highly trained personnel?
- Are there any physical or climatic barriers which would make implementation of the control measure difficult or impossible (for example, mountainous terrain, inadequate road systems, heavy rains, or extreme temperatures)?

Use your answers to these questions to assess each control measure to prevent cases and each control measure to prevent deaths and complications as having a relatively high, moderate, or low feasibility of being successfully implemented. Record your answers on Worksheet B in the column labeled "Technical Feasibility."

THE REMAINDER OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS WILL BE LIMITED TO THOSE CONTROL MEASURES WHICH HAD EITHER A "HIGH" OR "MODERATE" TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY. DRAW A LINE IN THOSE BOXES LABELED "ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY" AND "LIKELIHOOD OF GOOD PUBLIC RESPONSE" FOR ALL CONTROL MEASURES WHICH HAD A "LOW" TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY.

2.3 Assess Economic Feasibility

A second factor to consider when assessing feasibility of controlling a health problem is the relative economic feasibility of providing service using the available control measures. This assessment should be based on the cost to provide service to one child as often as necessary before that child reaches age 5. Some control measures, like measles immunizations, only need to be implemented once in a child's lifetime. Other control measures, like oral rehydration, may need to be given several times.

Identify the first control measure listed on Worksheet B which had a "high" or "moderate" technical feasibility. Use all available information on Fictitia to estimate the cost to implement this control measure as often as necessary in a child's first five years of life. Similarly, estimate the cost to implement each of the other listed control measures with "high" or "moderate" technical feasibility. The cost to provide immunization services for diphtheria and pertussis should be estimated as one total figure since the vaccines to prevent these diseases (DPT vaccine) are administered simultaneously.

The more expensive a control measure is to implement, the less economically feasible it is, since no country possesses unlimited resources. That is, if a measure is expensive, its economic feasibility is low, and if a measure is cheap, it is economically more feasible. Use your estimated costs to determine if the economic feasibility of implementing one control measure is relatively high, moderate, or low in comparison to other control measures. Enter your answers on Worksheet B in the column labeled "Economic Feasibility."

2.4 Assess Likelihood of Good Public Response

An effective control measure may exist, be easy to implement, and be relatively inexpensive, yet be unsuccessful because the public does not use it. Assessment of the likelihood of a good public response to a control measure can be based on public response to similar efforts in the past. To assess previous public response and the likelihood of response in the future, consider the following questions:

- Does the public think the health problem is important?
- Does the public think the control measure is necessary to prevent cases, deaths, and/or complications of the health problem?

- Is publicity likely to be effective in informing the public of how to take advantage of the control measure?
- Has the public had good experiences in the past with the health system and/or the control measure?
- Have barriers to participation existed in the past which may still exist? For example, is transportation available? Do social customs prevent mothers from using the service?

Examine any available information to answer the questions above for each listed control measure with "high" or "moderate" technical feasibility. Then use your answers to assess the relative likelihood of good public response to each control measure as high, moderate, or low. Enter your answers on Worksheet B in the column labeled "Likelihood of Good Public Response."

2.5 Assess Feasibility of the Control Measure

- Examine your answers recorded on Worksheet B for the first listed control measure. Use these answers to establish an overall assessment of the feasibility of implementing that control measure in Fictitia.

The way in which you make this overall assessment is again up to you. You may wish to average the answers or you may consider a certain criterion more important than the others and therefore wish to give it more weight. If the control measure had a "low" technical feasibility, its overall feasibility would be "low."

Assess the first listed control measure as having a relatively high, moderate, or low feasibility. Record your assessment on Worksheet B in the column labeled "Feasibility of Control Measure." Your assessment may not be the same as the assessments of others, so be prepared to explain it.

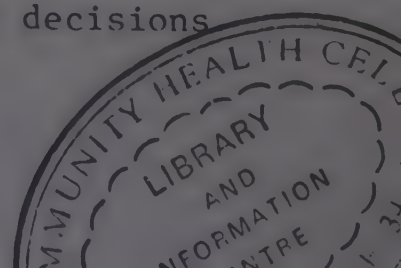
- Assess the overall feasibility of implementing each listed control measure using the procedure above. Record each assessment in the column labeled "Feasibility of Control Measure."
- For each listed health problem, select the control measure which received the highest overall assessment of feasibility. Circle these selected control measures. If the control measure to prevent cases of a health problem received the same overall assessment of

feasibility as the control measure to prevent deaths or complications of that problem, you may wish to re-examine available information to determine which control measure actually is more feasible. However, even after closer examination, you may decide that both control measures for that problem are equally feasible. If so, circle both control measures.

3.0 ESTABLISH PRIORITIES.

Having assessed the importance of each health problem and the feasibility of each control measure, the next step is to combine these judgments into a final assessment of priority. Fold out Worksheet C (page 23) and use it to record your assessments.

- 3.1 Transfer your assessments of importance from the last column in Worksheet A to Worksheet C in the column labeled "Overall Importance."
- 3.2 Record the most feasible control measure (or measures) for each health problem (circled on Worksheet B) to Worksheet C in the column labeled "Most Feasible Control Measure."
- 3.3 Transfer your assessments of the feasibility of the circled control measures from the last column in Worksheet B to Worksheet C in the column labeled "Feasibility of Control Measure."
- 3.4 The final assessment of priority for each health problem results from combining the assessments for "Overall Importance" and "Feasibility of Control Measure." Assess the priority of the first listed health problem to determine if it is high, moderate, or low, and record your assessment on Worksheet C in the column labeled "Overall Priority." Your assessment may not be the same as the assessments of other participants and Course Facilitators. Therefore, be prepared to explain your decision.
- 3.5 Repeat Step 3.4 for each of the other health problems, recording each assessment in the column labeled "Overall Priority."
- 3.6 Compare all of the overall assessments and determine if the relative priority of the health problems seems reasonable to you. Adjust the assessments if necessary in light of any other factors which you consider to be relevant. For example, you may decide to combine all of the diseases preventable by immunization and consider their priority collectively. Recognize that there are hidden factors, such as political preferences, that often affect decisions about priorities. Establishing priorities on a more objective basis allows you to make systematic decisions and to know the reasons for those decisions even if they are altered by other decision-makers. Data for selecting priorities may not always be accurate or complete, but that data should improve with time and can then be used to make even more objective decisions.



3.7 Place a check (✓) beside the health problems which received "high" overall priority.

CONCLUSION

This module describes a procedure for selecting priority health problems in a country. This procedure involves three major steps:

- Assess importance of each health problem.
- Assess feasibility of each principal control measure.
- Combine these assessments to establish priorities.

Selection of priority health problems will ensure that efforts are focused on the primary health care interventions which promise to have the greatest impact on reducing morbidity and mortality.

After you have completed this module, let a Course Facilitator know that you are ready for a group discussion on the module.

A

THE HEALTH PROBLEM

ty	Disability	Overall Importance

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d Worksheet A, discuss
urse Facilitator.

ET B

THE CONTROL MEASURE

[illegible]

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continued

Economic Feasibility	Likelihood of Good Public Response	Feasibility of Control Measure
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- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -

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continued

Economic Feasibility	Likelihood of Good Public Response	Feasibility of Control Measure

Low.

Worksheet B, return to page 11 and
Section 3.0, "Establish

C

PRIORITIES

le l e	Feasibility of Control Measure	Overall Priority

low.

ed Worksheet C,
n page 13.

ANNEX:

EXTRA COPIES OF WORKSHEETS

Note: The materials in this Annex may be adapted for use in selecting your country's priority health problems.

WORKSHEET A

ASSESSING IMPORTANCE OF THE HEALTH PROBLEM

Health Problem	Incidence	Mortality	Disability	Overall Importance

Record assessments as high, moderate, or low.

WORKSHEET B

ASSESSING FEASIBILITY OF THE CONTROL MEASURE

Health Problem	Principal Control Measure	Technical Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Likelihood of Good Public Response	Feasibility of Control Measure
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				

Record assessments as high, moderate, or low.

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WORKSHEET B -- continued

Health Problem	Principal Control Measure	Technical Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Likelihood of Good Public Response	Feasibility of Control Measure
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				

Record assessments as high, moderate, or low.

--continued

WORKSHEET B -- continued

Health Problem	Principal Control Measure	Technical Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Likelihood of Good Public Response	Feasibility of Control Measure
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				
	To prevent cases:				
	----- To prevent deaths or complications:				

Record assessments as high, moderate, or low.

WORKSHEET C

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

Health Problem	Overall Importance	Most Feasible Control Measure	Feasibility of Control Measure	Overall Priority

Record assessments as high, moderate, or low.

